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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000666

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TAGS: PGOV PREL ZI MZ

SUBJECT: PRESIDENCY MINISTER ON ZIMBABWE: "WE'RE DEFENDING NATIONAL INTERESTS, NOT MUGABE"

REF: MAPUTO 603

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Todd Chapman for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: After being told that the GRM's stance on Zimbabwe harms the government's international reputation and that a stronger effort--beyond quiet diplomacy--is imperative, Minister of the Presidency Antonio Sumabana claimed that the GRM views Mugabe as a dangerous madman who could inflict significant damage on Mozambique, including sabotaging the energy generation infrastructure of Cahora Bassa Dam or Mozambican railroads. He said that the GRM's 'fragility' made it difficult to speak out, but that President Guebuza had actually done so in addition to behind-the-scenes efforts. The GRM sees their stance--which we might consider as 'head-in-the-sand'--as prudent conflict avoidance with both Zimbabwe and with South Africa, and task-shifting to SADC. Even so, increasing civil sector criticism suggests that the GRM could be swayed with additional, high-level USG intervention. END SUMMARY.

GRM Told That Silence Hurts Int'l Reputation

¶2. (C) Following a joint demarche with nine other Embassies on President Guebuza to discuss Zimbabwe on June 27 (reftel), I requested a one-on-one meeting with Minister of the Presidency Antonio Sumbana the following week to have a more frank discussion on the subject. I told Sumbana that while the group appreciated the opportunity to meet with the President, the general consensus was that it was a disappointing result as Guebuza simply repeated the official stand-behind-SADC response. The Minister was especially concerned when told that Mozambique's 'quiet diplomacy' on Zimbabwe was hurting the GRM's reputation in Washington and in many other capitals.

"Mugabe is a Madman Who Can Harm Mozambique"

¶3. (C) Sumbana reacted defensively but with greater candor than in previous discussions on Zimbabwe. He noted his own recent visit to Harare (where he formerly served as Ambassador) to meet with Mozambique's Ambassador, who concluded that Mugabe had suffered from some kind of mental breakdown resulting in erratic behavior. "Mugabe is a madman who can cause Mozambique a lot of trouble" was a constant theme throughout our conversation. Sumbana recounted how ZANU's soldiers had bases in Mozambique when fighting against Rhodesia and that many in the Zimbabwean military knew Mozambique well. "If Mugabe sent someone to blow up the electricity generators at Cahora Bassa dam or our railroads,

it would cause Mozambique great economic hardship. We want Mugabe gone, of course we do, but we cannot afford to have Mugabe attack Mozambique. We have to think more about our national interest," he concluded.

"GRM's Fragility Makes Public Comment Difficult...

14. (C) After I elaborated on the political costs to Mozambique of remaining silent and not publicly condemning the political violence, Sumbana retorted that Mozambique was not getting credit for the actions they had taken, including refusing entry of the Chinese ship with Zimbabwe-bound arms into a Mozambican port. I (again) commended the GRM's decision to reject the Chinese vessel, but said that we were looking for continuing measures by the GRM to encourage positive change in Zimbabwe, and reiterated that silent diplomacy isn't enough. "But we are an extremely fragile country, even more so now with the food crisis and the rising fuel prices," said the Minister. He reiterated the argument that Western governments chose to chastise misbehaving leaders publicly, whereas the African way was to do so privately. Reminded of the positions taken by Botswana, Zambia, and Tanzania, Sumbana replied it was much easier for more stable countries like Botswana and Tanzania to make such statements, but Mozambique as a fragile state could not endure any potential retaliation from Mugabe.

...but We Have Spoken Out In the Right Forum"

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15. (C) I suggested to Sumbana that he consider briefing a smaller group of countries, with a view of being more transparent about President Guebuza's actions behind the scenes. He liked the suggestion but said he would have to clear it with the President. The next day, Sumbana agreed to the meeting and asked that I host it at my residence. I invited the British, French (representing the EU), Canadian and Swedish Ambassadors for lunch with Sumbana and Presidential Counselor Carlos Pessane on July 10. The Minister shared much of the same information about Mozambique's fear of reprisals, but added that the President did communicate often with Mbeki and believed they were making progress towards a negotiated political settlement in Zimbabwe. Defending his President, Pessane stated that Guebuza was very direct with Mugabe during their recent meeting at Sharm al Sheik on his need to negotiate with the MDC. Pessane reminded us that Guebuza did hold a press conference in Egypt July 2nd lamenting the political violence in Zimbabwe and underscoring the importance of political negotiations. They believed this statement demonstrated GRM intent and responded to our earlier expressed concerns about Mozambican reticence. The British, French, Canadian, and Swedish Ambassadors all presented their perspectives on how Mozambique was being viewed in their capitals with the common thread being a general disappointment with the GRM's failure to take a more visibly apparent role in arguing for the preservation of democratic principles in Zimbabwe.

COMMENT/PROPOSED ACTION

16. (C) The GRM claims that they want Mugabe gone and are working behind the scenes to support SADC's efforts to promote a negotiated solution--and have pointed to several concrete steps they have taken to that end. At the same time, the Mozambicans frequently mention having already suffered much as a result of the Zimbabwean crisis and appear to have concluded they have too much to lose by criticizing Mugabe openly. Although Zimbabwe forces might be unlikely to have the capability to muster any sort of sabotage action in

the short term--thus weakening Minister Sumbana's claim--perhaps more important is the GRM's hesitancy of being seen by Mbeki as parting ways with SAG efforts. The GRM appears to feel that the overall bilateral relationship with South Africa is too important to take an independent position. Hence, the GRM strategy, such that there is one, seems to be to hope the Zimbabwe problem will simply go away.

While we would call that a head-in-the-sand strategy, they would characterize it as prudent conflict avoidance and task shifting to SADC. Nonetheless, Mozambique's independent media are increasingly critical of the GRM's stance, civil society groups are hosting events challenging the absence of more visible GRM action, and public sentiment about Zimbabwe is increasingly negative. In this environment, I believe that a high-level call from Washington to Foreign Minister Oldemiro Baloi would be useful to help underscore U.S. and international concern about the continuing political violence and impasse in Zimbabwe. As a relatively new Minister, however, he does not yet have the sway to convince the President to change course and adopt a more activist position which might be at variance with South Africa. Sumbana is the one who must be turned. Another useful Washington action would be to call in Mozambican Ambassador to the U.S. Armando Panguene. While not viewed as one of Africa's most agile Ambassadors in Washington, he does have a direct channel back to President Guebuza and to Sumbana, therefore it is worth calling him in for a frank discussion.

Chapman